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ABSTRACT

"Restructuring" is a term whose meaning varies according to which group is using it. National political leaders often use the term in reference to public school choice. At state and district levels, restructuring is often associated with pushing decision making authority to the local level. Leaders in teachers' unions call restructuring a tool for empowerment. The business community can use the term to describe more active partnerships between businesses and schools. To community activists, it can mean heightened parent and community involvement. To researchers and practitioners, restructuring is a movement to promote higher order learning outcomes for students. Brief summaries of regional action and agendas from seven states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) and a guest commentary by Lourdes Monteagudo, Deputy Mayor for Education, City of Chicago, are included. A list of 19 references and resources is also provided. (EJS)

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Policy Briefs

Number 4 • 1990

A Publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Restructuring: A New Agenda for Schools

A National Perspective

by Todd Fennimore, NCREL Program Associate

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Policy Briefs are reports on the status of current issues in education from a national perspective, descriptions of actions and agendas in the NCREL region, commentaries by experts from their particular point of view, and resources for further information.

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"Restructuring" is a term whose meaning varies according to which actors in the policy arena are using it and for what purpose.

National political leaders often use the term in reference to parental choice. Choice, they believe, will introduce competition into public education. Many argue that this will result ultimately in greater responsiveness and accountability to the clients of schools—students and their parents. Choice and open enrollment plans, then, become the impetus for restructuring, and the rich array of high-performing, alternative schools that may spring forth represent the fruit of restructuring.

At the state and district levels, restructuring often is associated with pushing greater decision-making authority down to the local level and then waiving state or district regulations to accommodate building-level experimentation.

Leaders in the teachers' unions call for restructuring as a tool to empower teachers and to encourage participatory decision making. They feel that unless teachers are given more autonomy to make curricular, instructional, and even fiscal decisions, they cannot exercise their professional judgment to create the best learning environment possible for their students.

In the business community, restructuring often is associated with greater choice and competition in the public education sector, more active partnerships between businesses and schools, and greater use of instructional technologies to make student learning more efficient. In addition, many business organizations are insisting that schools graduate young adults who have the skills to work in teams, to solve problems and trouble shoot, to reason quantitatively, and to communicate effectively in writing and speech.

Among many community activists, the notion of restructuring means heightened involvement of parents and the community in the schools' decision-making process, better articulation of schools with other community agencies, and improved postsecondary and career outcomes for high-school graduates. In Chicago, for example, this activism has resulted in legislation to establish local school councils. These councils are empowered to make building-level policy and are composed of the principal, teachers, and parent and community representatives.

Among some researchers and school practitioners interested in reform, restructuring is described as a movement to promote higher-order learning outcomes for all students. These reformers call for making a set of comprehensive and integrated changes across every dimension of schooling—curriculum, instruction, assessment, the social organization of schools, and school-community relations.

Restructuring stands in contrast to what is known as—"school improvement" or the "effective schools movement." These initiatives most often result in piecemeal changes in selected areas, while fundamental restructuring requires a rethinking of the entire school system.

By orchestrating schooling policies and structures with learning outcomes, restructuring advocates are helping schools redefine roles, responsibilities, and relationships so that changes center on the improvement of learning. Students actively engage in meaningful learning, focusing on developing themselves as thinkers capable of acquiring and using knowledge. Teachers take on new roles as collaborators, mentors, and coaches to create environments that promote meaningful learning. Administrators take the lead in forming school structures and processes that support these learning environments. And the community and parents become partners in promoting meaningful learning.

Restructured, learning-centered schools reflect new patterns of active, engaged, and participatory interaction among administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. For example, teachers work with other teachers to deliver an interdisciplinary curriculum and to share and model teaching strategies that promote collaboration and inquiry in the classroom. Students assist other students in thinking through problems and issues. Community members come into the school to share their expertise; students go outside the school to plan and implement community-based projects. And administrators, teachers, parents, and community members collaborate on how to apply new teaching and learning research and forward-thinking practice. These new interactions reflect both the spirit and substance of restructured schools.

Federal, state, and district initiatives can help schools in their restructuring efforts by facilitating the formation of networks of restructured schools, providing technical assistance, offering grants to support promising restructured models, and waiving regulations to allow for experimentation. These strategies are designed to enhance the capacity of schools to undertake their own restructuring efforts (Cohen, 1988). Most of all, government officials can take leadership in calling for comprehensive and systemic changes in schools and in focusing the restructuring movement on improved learning for all students, so that schools and communities can be key players in creating a positive future for all their youth. ■

Regional Action & Agendas

Illinois

Based on Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School (Sizer, 1984), the Coalition of Essential Schools was established in 1984 as a secondary school/university partnership devoted to strengthening students' learning by reforming each school's priorities and simplifying its structure. The Coalition brings together public and private schools nationwide to work with Chairman Ted Sizer and Brown University staff in translating the imperatives of the report into working models.

A related effort called "Re: Learning" is now underway through the leadership of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) in collaboration with the Coalition. Re: Learning recognizes the need for change throughout the entire educational system. It fosters both the restructuring of secondary schools and the redesign of state and district supporting functions to improve learning for all students.

The State of Illinois has agreed to participate in the Re: Learning Pilot Project. During its five-year commitment, the state will identify a selected group of middle and secondary schools to become part of the Coalition. The Illinois project will be known as The Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools. Rather than put forth a specific model to be replicated, the Alliance Schools will guide their programs with the same set of common principles that guide the Coalition schools.

Legislation

The Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools originates not from legislation, but from the desire of schools and the State Board of Education to create a school environment that encourages students to think critically and creatively.

Future

During the past year, the State Board identified ten middle and secondary schools to participate in this project for five years. After year-long training, the schools are preparing to make appropriate changes in priorities and to organize themselves on behalf of student learning. The schools are located in Chicago, Roselle, Pekin, Sparta, Dundee, Multa, Alton, Anna-Jonesboro, and Elmwood. An additional four or five middle and secondary schools will join the Alliance soon.

The Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools received two major grants: a $96,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation, representing the largest award given during the current year, and a grant from Southwestern Bell, a consistent contributor to educational pursuits. These grants will assist the Alliance in developing a research base and providing training for Alliance "coaches" who will work with member schools.

For more information please contact:
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62777
Sally B. Pancrazio
(217) 782-3950

Indiana

Some Indiana schools already employ components of restructuring, and others have indicated an interest in adopting the concept. The State Superintendent appointed a Task Force to study and make recommendations on restructuring and what it means for Indiana schools. The initial recommendations of the Task Force concern curriculum and instruction, governance and finance, and empowerment.

Curriculum and instruction recommendations include: 1) refine state proficiencies and intervention processes for all students; 2) design a secondary education program which allows for the completion of core subjects by the end of the tenth grade (after mastery, all students select from multiple options including specialized high schools, occupational centers, and university extensions); 3) facilitate the integration of technology into instruction and management functions to insure all students have access to worldwide resources and support in their personalized learning (the Department will develop and disseminate models of existing programs and related staff development); and 4) design and disseminate guidelines for the development of an effective early adolescence educational program.

Governance and finance recommendations include: 1) provide financial and technical support for school corporations to facilitate development of restructured schools; 2) provide the Department of Education with resources/funding to enable staff members to provide corporations with the direction and help they need in their restructuring efforts; and 3) provide funding or incentives for the formative and summative evaluation of programs enacted by the General Assembly and the major educational restructuring programs developed by local school corporations and disseminate information through workshops and publications.

Recommendations in the area of empowerment include: 1) design "challenge grant" eligibility criteria to emphasize site-based decision making in the restructuring of schools; 2) identify and develop alternative school improvement council models (models will include, but not be limited to: restructuring empowerment concepts for community, parents, students, teachers, and administrators; lifelong learning; and experiential and community service programs); and 3) develop a comprehensive communication plan to increase public awareness of and support for the restructuring efforts, i.e., the needs, the problems, the issues, and the action plan.

Legislation

No legislation pertaining to school restructuring is expected in the General Assembly which convened in January 1990.

Future

The Task Force will meet over the next two years and report periodically to the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education.

The Department will continue development of school improvement demonstrations and replications.

For more information please contact:
Indiana Department of Education
State House, Room 229
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798
Carol D'Amico: (317) 232-6667 or
Phyllis Land Usher: (317) 232-6984

Iowa

Interest in school restructuring is high among key staff in the Iowa Department of Education. Shared decision making, site-based management, new roles for teachers, and increased interest in teaching and learning are energizing Iowa teachers. Competition for limited staff and student time intensifies as program and staff development efforts increase.

Legislation

The Annual Phase III allocation available for districts and Area Education Agencies is $42 million. Beginning in 1991, allocations will increase by the allowable rate if a performance-based pay plan is implemented. Over half of Iowa's districts are now involved in implementing performance-based pay as a result of some degree of financial incentives offered through this legislation.

Future

A statewide conference on restructuring through Phase III was held January 8-9, 1990.

For more information please contact:
Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Ted Stilwill
(515) 281-3333

Michigan

The Michigan State Board of Education has supported comprehensive school improvement efforts for the past four years. Part of this support has included the concept of restructuring, which has been defined as "reforming the interrelationships of an organization; a strategy used to analyze and redesign the organization or structure of a school building in order to achieve desired student outcomes."

Legislation

For the 1989-90 fiscal year, the State Legislature appropriated $2 million in Section 90 of the State School Aid Act to provide funds to implement school building-level pilot projects that will improve student outcomes by restructuring the educational delivery system. The State Board of Education awarded $1.9 million of this money to 39 pilot projects. The other $100,000 was awarded to fund a regional technical assistance center at an intermediate school district to begin developing a network of restructured schools and to conduct an evaluation of the use of the pilot project funds.

The Department of Education provided $500,000 to continue development of the Education Extension Service (EES) at Michigan State University. This innovative collaborative effort among local schools, state and intermediate levels, and institutions of higher education will produce "Professional Development Schools" to translate research and other new knowledge into practice and to demonstrate the kinds and levels of student achievement that the use of new knowledge can produce. The EES also includes a dissemination component to make this practical, applied knowledge more accessible to educators across Michigan.

Future

During this fiscal year, the Michigan Department of Education will sponsor two major conferences on restructuring. One will be to create a statewide network of schools involved in pilot restructuring projects and any who are interested in the strategy; the other will be to build business coalitions to support and develop more comprehensive restructuring models. A $45,000 grant from the Education Commission of the States and the Southwestern Bell foundation will support this effort.

Continued interest and support for school improvement and restructuring is expected during the next several years. The current state administration has been strongly supportive of these endeavors.

For more information please contact:
Michigan Department of Education
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Nancy Haas: (517) 373-6724 or
Deb Clemmons: (517) 373-3609

Minnesota

The 1988 Minnesota Legislature established the Office of Educational Leadership within the Department of Education, with a direct linkage to the legislature, to assist school districts and other educational organizations in maximizing the learning of all pupils. This office has granted ten $100,000 awards to sites representing a diverse mix of district size and geographic distribution, and a mix of buildings, districts, clusters of districts, and education districts. Each site will function in a research and development role to ascertain the factors which support or hinder the transformation processes in education. The transformation intended in the r&d program is to move schools to reconceptualize their vision of the schooling process and psychologically commit to new visions and forms.

Legislation

The legislation created the Office of Educational Leadership and a seven-member advisory committee and mandated the creation of a two-year plan to determine the effectiveness of outcome-based systems of education in improving student learning. The r&d sites will serve as the research base for this program. Each site must establish and maintain an affiliation with a teacher preparation institution which incorporates a learner outcome-based system of education in the teacher training process. Existing school improvement programs (i.e., the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program; Assurance of Mastery Program; North Central Association; Planning, Evaluation and Reporting (PER); and the Restructured Model for Secondary Vocational Education) will be incorporated into these sites as well. Biennial funding is $1.5 million.

Future

Each site will identify a leadership team including central office staff, principals, teachers, and parents and provided them with a staff development process designed to increase their leadership skills. This training will be personalized and utilize pre-post assessment strategies and differentiated learning processes. Additional training will be developed to teach these teams the components of outcome-based systems of education, so that they can facilitate the development of systems appropriate for their respective sites. This training will include a clinical experience in which r&d site staff, parents, and students will "try-out" an outcome-based system.

For more information please contact:
Minnesota Department of Education
Office of Educational Leadership
660 Capitol Square Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101
Richard J. Mesenburg
(612) 296-4064

Ohio

In June of 1989, Ohio passed two pieces of legislation that contain extensive reform and accountability measures. Following is a brief description of the legislation.

Legislation

Two state-level commissions, two state-level committees, and a state-level task force have been established to help reach excellence in education and assure greater accountability.

The state will add money to the federally funded Head Start program to enable currently eligible, but unserved, students to participate.

The General Assembly has provided money for educating 3-4-year-olds since 1985. In the previous two state budgets, money was allocated first to develop preschool models and then, in the form of shared costs, to adopt one of the models. Under 1989 legislation, school districts with particular needs for additional assistance can receive grants for program development.

In the past, schools had to offer kindergarten, but parents were not required to send their children. Beginning with the 1990-91 school year, kindergarten will be required before entering first grade. Additionally, all children entering kindergarten or first grade for the first time must be screened for hearing, vision, speech, communications, health, and medical problems, and for developmental disorders.

Grants are now available to help districts that are striving to increase school attendance and decrease dropouts. The new budget bill also has an appropriation to allow school districts to conduct tuition-free summer school programs for remediation and to expand Reading Recovery to help more first graders read better. Additionally, there will be a third grade guarantee, ensuring that each student is evaluated for certain reading and writing competencies by the end of the second grade. By the end of 1989, first-time General Educational Development test-takers were permitted to take the test once without paying a fee.

Two major changes are occurring in statewide testing. Beginning with the 1989-90 school year, ability and achievement tests must be taken in grades 4, 6, and 8. The results must be reported to the Ohio Department of Education for release to the public. In the 1990-91 school year, students in grade 10 will be tested. The second change is that Ohio will have its first high school graduation exam in 1990-91. This year's eighth graders — the class of 1994 — will be the first class required to pass the test to graduate.

Under 1989 Ohio legislation, parents will have more freedom in choosing their children's schools. According to the law, each district must adopt a policy permitting open enrollment within the district and decide whether to permit or prohibit open enrollment between districts. Both actions must occur by the start of the 1993-94 school year. Districts engaging in open enrollment must maintain racial balance. High school juniors and seniors taking college classes while attending high school can have the credit earned applied toward graduation from high school, from college, or both. If only high school credit is awarded, the state must reimburse the college for the student's expenses.

A new reporting system will help the public understand the programs, students, and staff in schools. In addition to test scores, the new public reporting system will include such information as the number of teachers by district, by grade level, and by subject; the cost of programs by building and grade level; the amount of time students spend in classes for credit as opposed to the time spent in study hall; and the number of needy students and other demographic information. All data from a specified list must be shared and reported.

Other legislation includes the areas of teacher assistance, parenting, guaranteed graduates, community literacy, school performance standards, and business advisory councils.

Future

The composition and promulgation of rules for all new items passed by the legislature and analysis of pilot projects authorized in the legislation are in progress.

For more information please contact:
Ohio Department of Education
65 South Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43266-0308
Margaret Trent
(614) 466-4838

Wisconsin

The issue of restructuring is not well defined on a statewide basis in Wisconsin at this time; however, a number of district initiatives fall within a general definition. These include site-based management, new definitions of teaming, participatory management, school-based decision making, peer coaching, and administrative organization restructuring.

Legislation

Wisconsin has no impending legislation in this area.

Future

Wisconsin will monitor events in other states and gather information and materials.

For more information please contact:
Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction
125 S. Webster
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, Wisconsin 53707
Tom Stefonek
(608) 266-1782

Guest Commentary

by Lourdes Monteagudo, Deputy Mayor for Education, City of Chicago

There is no simple blueprint for creating good schools. Good schools are the creation of a particular school community that responds to the needs of the children and reflects what the community believes to be important for children to learn. However, there are several characteristics common to good schools.

Good schools effectively meet students where they are and find ways to nurture them and challenge them to learn. These schools accept the responsibility to help children learn and do not blame the children for their own inability to reach them.

In good schools, teachers and administrators know and respect their students and respond to their needs as they would to those of their own children.

Good schools are organized and driven by a common philosophy and set of values. These schools continually review what, how, and why things are taught and make sure that methods, practices, curriculum, and all teaching materials reflect the philosophy.

Good schools have high expectations for all students, provide adequate opportunities for them to learn, and create a safe and stable climate for learning. In these schools, teachers want to work and students want to learn because the school provides a motivating environment.

Urban schools across America are in trouble. Spiraling dropout rates, declining student achievement, frustrated and inadequately prepared teachers, gangs and drugs, graduates who can't read or add—all are really symptoms of a deeper crisis. The crisis is in our classrooms where children's needs are not recognized and where their parents' and society's expectations are not met. These symptoms of ineffective schools need to be examined, and the underlying causes addressed.

By realizing the depth of the problems and committing to substantial change, we can turn failing schools of today into successful schools of the future. The crisis we face can be met and resolved. Good public schools are still possible.

In a democracy, one of the fundamental responsibilities of public schools is the education of free people for full participation in society. A democratic society requires people to think, to question, to read critically, to criticize freely but constructively, to speak and write persuasively, to work cooperatively in communities, to develop shared values by considering the common good, and to be willing to link consciousness to conduct. Democracy requires an enlightened, empowered, and active citizenry.

If we are serious about creating schools that have democratic empowerment as a basic goal, then we must rethink and restructure much of what goes on in classrooms. We need to create schools that respond to the experiences and needs of the children they serve as they continuously reflect upon how children learn and how schools and teachers can help them learn.

Planned school changes are difficult because schools are complex institutions that were created for another era. Most of us only know schools the way we experienced schools. Over the years new programs have been added, others taken away, but for the most part, we still have the same basic structure and the same underlying values and philosophies. Solutions to difficult problems take the shape of band-aid approaches that, many times, are only cosmetic in nature. Schools have become obsolete institutions that fail to engage our youth and fail to respond to the needs of our communities.

It is time for our schools to be revisited, reorganized, and fundamentally restructured. School restructuring must involve bottom-up and inside-out rather than top-down efforts. It must be site-based and grounded in the realities of the local situations. Restructuring must be on the agenda for all schools. Good schools can become better, and failing schools can be turned around. For the sake of our children's future and the future of our nation, we must make radical deeply rooted changes in the institution that will prevent the demise of the American system of public education. ■

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) launched a nine-part video series on February 14, 1990, entitled, "Restructuring to Promote Learning in America's Schools."

The topics of the video series are: 1) The New Definition of Learning: The First Step for School Reform (February 14); 2) The Thinking Curriculum (March 21); 3) The Collaborative Classroom: Reconnecting Teachers and Learners (April 26); 4) Multidimensional Assessment: Strategies for Schools (May 24); 5) Schools as Learning Communities (June 6); 6) Many Roads to Fundamental Reform: Getting Started (June 20); 7) Many Roads to Fundamental Reform: Countinuing to Grow (July 11); 8) The Meaning of Staff Development in the 21st Century (July 25); 9) Reconnecting Students at Risk to the Learning Process (August 8).

The video series uses telecommunications as a catalyst for creating a forum on restructuring. Telecommunications can bridge geographic separations and create networks of common stakeholders in restructuring efforts.

One of the many opportunities offered by the video series for creating and supporting networks of common stakeholders is Learning Link. Using this system, anyone with access to a microcomputer, modem, and telecommunications software can interact with other viewers, selected video series presenters, or specially trained staff that can answer specific questions about any of the nine video conferences.

For more information on this series please contact Debra Beauprez at NCREL: (708) 941-7677.

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ILLINOIS

The Coalition of Essential Commission of the States sponsor several national forums for schools involved in the Re: Learning Program.

INDIANA

Contact "Slice of Tomorrow's Schools" (SLICE) project personnel. SLICE projects explore and develop alternative teaching strategies, styles, technologies and environments.

IOWA

A draft publication "Phase III: Restructuring Iowa's Schools" is available. Information on the "Iowa SUCCESS Network - Outcome Based Education" is also available.

MICHIGAN

Redesign/Restructuring Grants are available.

OHIO

Summaries of recent legislation as well as the current state of educational policy and practice are available. "Restructuring Education in Ohio," Ohio Department of Education, October 1989.

Please contact individual states for resources and available products.

Opinions expressed in the commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the NCREL staff or Board. Facts and ideas presented in NCREL's Policy Briefs are intended to survey a current issue and not to advocate a particular position.

Policy Briefs

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